

The Necropolitics of Liberty: Sovereignty, Fantasy, and United States Gun Culture

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ABSTRACT This article approaches the speculative fiction of the survivalist right as an archive that can illuminate the continuities between the fantasies of necropolitical power that animate the radical right and undergird the sovereignty of the United States. Focusing on Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupier LaVoy Finicum's 2015 novel *Only by Blood and Suffering: Regaining Lost Freedom*, this essay argues that such survivalist fiction, in imagining a future civil conflict that enables the reinstatement of Lockean property rights, should be understood as settler colonial rather than anti-statist. In representing the dystopian future in which "public lands" are reopened as a frontier, survivalist novels like Finicum's reaffirm, rather than challenge, the fantasy that produces the constituted power of the United States.

KEYWORDS fiction, gun culture, necropolitics, settler colonialism, sovereignty, speculative fiction, United States

Introduction: The Survivalist Novel and Public Policy

In his 1998 speculative novel *Patriots: A Novel of Survival in the Coming Collapse*, survivalist-guru-cum-novelist James Wesley, Rawles [*sic*] concludes with a chapter set in a future university classroom. The professor featured in the scene is one of the novel's heroes, a white man and a militia leader who fought in "the Second Civil War" to rid the United States of forces representing globalism and socialism.¹ He is about to start a lesson when he is interrupted by an alarmed female student who is pointing at one of her male peers: "He's got a gun!" she exclaims. "He's carrying a concealed weapon! That's not allowed on campus!" Though the class is a physics lecture, the professor finds a "teachable moment" in the young woman's outburst, and offers his female student a civics and history lesson: "this young gentleman's choice to carry a gun—for whatever reason he chooses—is his own. He is a Sovereign Citizen and *sui juris*. The state has no say in the matter . . . I should also remind you that this is one of the main reasons we spent four horrendous years fighting the Second Civil War."

While the scene is indicative of the pedantic tone of Rawles's novels, it also speaks to the improbable ability of the social movements of the radical right to move the needle on state and federal policy. In 1998, the notion that carrying firearms into university classrooms should be either tolerated or celebrated as a performance of popular sovereignty was nothing but a fantasy of a radical subculture. Twenty years later, it is an increasingly mainstream position within the Republican party, ten states have "campus carry" laws on the books mandating tolerance for the concealed carry of firearms on university

campuses, and the president of the United States is advocating for instructors to carry guns into university and K–12 classrooms.²

The speculative fiction of the paramilitary right provides an archive of novels that, while predictably deplorable as literary objects, offer a productive site for understanding the fantasy of popular sovereignty that shapes gun policy in the United States. While only occasionally noted as oddities by mainstream media critics, these novels play an outsized role in the “alternative public sphere” of the radical right.³ Cheap to produce and disseminate (they are often published in serial form on blogs and websites before the successful ones are self published or published by independent right-wing publishing houses), and offering a space of plausible deniability in which to discuss activities that might otherwise provide grounds for prosecution, novels have been central to building and maintaining many of the ideological communities and the celebrity activist personas connected to the paramilitary right.

In this essay, drawn from a broader project engaging these novels, I argue that this archive and the ideology it espouses deserves more serious scrutiny by those seeking to reduce gun violence in the United States. I focus on one particularly influential survivalist novel, *Only by Blood and Suffering: Regaining Lost Freedom*, written by Lavoy Finicum. Finicum was the once small-time right-wing media figure who gained national fame and became a hero of the gun culture and land transfer movement for his role in the events surrounding the armed seizure of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge by Ammon and Ryan Bundy and their supporters in 2016, a role that ended with his eventual death at the hands of FBI agents and the Oregon Highway Patrol at the conclusion of that occupation. I argue that the remarkable transformation of the fiction of Second Amendment advocates like Finicum and Rawles into the realm of policy has been facilitated by the fact that their politics is grounded in a broadly held fantasy about the nature of popular sovereignty in the United States. To be contested, this fantasy must be critiqued as a phenomenon endemic to US political culture rather than dismissed as a radical outlier to that culture. Such a reckoning demands a transhistorical perspective that can understand the ways in which this fantasy is both productive of and maintained by the violence of white settler sovereignty.

Liberal Gun Politics and The Legacy of the Frontier

The impasse of the contemporary gun debate hinges on a disagreement regarding how the control of violence should be reconfigured. The right argues that we need more “good guys with guns,” further distributing necropolitical sovereignty—the ability to determine “who may live and who must die”—throughout the (often implicitly white) populous.⁴ This argument posits that the democratic distribution of necropolitical power is not only a necessity for protecting citizens from crime, but also for protecting citizens from the power of a potentially tyrannical state.

Conservative commitment to this position is illegible without a consideration of the exigencies that shaped United States sovereignty in the first instance. In the lead up to revolution, and in the early years of the republic, settlers demanded the independence to wield necropolitical power over the Indigenous populations they conquered and the Black populations they enslaved when and where they chose, even as they looked to the military power of the imperial state to aid them in that effort. This fundamental ambivalence

regarding the relationship between private and state violence produced by these circumstances was enshrined in our political culture as the Second Amendment, and continues to inform narratives of popular sovereignty across the political spectrum.⁵

Liberal responses to this argument face a conundrum, in that they work to reframe gun violence in the present as a biopolitical emergency (casting gun violence as a public health crisis) without challenging the legitimacy of the historical violence that once justified the widespread private ownership of firearms. They accomplish this feat by imagining an historical break that distinguishes the legitimate violence of the frontier from illegitimate gun violence in the present. Legal scholar Charles W. Collier's 2014 *Critical Inquiry* article "The Death of Gun Control: An American Tragedy" offers a good example of how this narrative tends to be articulated. The United States, this argument claims, was once a colony and then a frontier nation in which the private ownership of guns played a meaningful role securing the self-defense of citizens and providing a bulwark against tyranny, but that time has passed. While this argument is bolstered by undeniable facts about the present, it also relies on the affirmation of a mythic past in which—as Collier claims via an unqualified citation of Frederick Jackson Turner—"the frontier is productive of individualism."⁶ Like Turner, Collier relies on elision of the anti-Indigenous violence that enabled frontier expansion in order to affirm that the frontier was once productive of democratic values, as the curious verb constructions in the following passage make clear:

I think the cultural heritage of the frontier is in . . . a precarious position. The "rugged individualism" of the frontier—transposed into modern conditions in the form of gun violence—has come to threaten its own cultural heritage. With every new convulsion of death and destruction, the cultural conversation casts that individualist paradigm in an ever dimmer light, making its original virtues harder to discern. The little house on the prairie *has become* a major crime scene.⁷

The Laura Ingalls Wilder novel referenced in the final sentence is the story of the armed occupation of Osage lands, illegal even under US law when it occurred.⁸ "The Little House on the Prairie" was a major crime scene. A commitment to the "cultural heritage" of the frontier, and the political imaginary it produced, makes the acknowledgement of this fact impossible.

The course of action implicitly offered by Collier in his attempt to decry gun violence while upholding the "cultural heritage" of the frontier is predictably "precarious." The imposition of a more totalizing state monopoly of violence is difficult, as legal scholar Sanford Levinson famously argued, to square with other political beliefs about protecting individual freedoms that most liberals hold.⁹ It is certainly inconsistent with recent left-liberal critiques of police violence and of the surveillance state.

The contradictions that emerge in liberal arguments about the Second Amendment are perhaps symptomatic of a broader aporia in the US liberal imagination. Aziz Rana argues that the "symbolic power of the constitution" has been crucial to allowing white Americans to imagine the US as "the quintessential civic polity . . . a liberal society engaged in a process of self fulfillment" while at the same time maintaining their structural position as the beneficiaries of the inequalities produced by racism and colonialism.¹⁰ "This dominant narrative" hinges on a dehistoricizing move whereby, in Rana's words, it "neglects to depict the civic drive—aimed at vesting sovereignty in all people 'regardless of race, colour, creed, gender, language or ethnicity'—as only a relatively recent development. Instead, this account reads such aspirations back into the very founding of the United

States, albeit while accepting the extent to which equality may have been deferred in historical fact."¹¹ This disavowal of the fundamentally colonial origins of the constitution is an essential rhetorical strategy for "de-emphasizing the need for material restitution and symbolic rupture" required to imagine a genuinely decolonial and anti-racist break with the violent foundations of US sovereignty.¹²

In the United States, the notion that the frontier was a site productive of liberal values is not merely a conservative or liberal ideological position. It is central to the constitutive fantasy that makes ideology—and that ideology's undoing—possible. Jacqueline Rose argues that examining the role of fantasy in politics "can help us understand the symptom of statehood, why there is something inside the very process upholding the state as a reality which threatens and exceeds it."¹³ Rose's work on fantasy and the state—especially the sense in which it articulates the possibility of a political unconscious that simultaneously produces state subjects and produces a threat to that state's continued sovereignty—offers an approach to fantasy that allows us to apprehend the right's claims about the republican values of the gun in ways that both map their contradictions and trace their relationship to the US state itself.

To date, the liberal imagination has taken a rather different tack, attempting to exorcise this fantasy from state politics altogether. Right-wing paramilitary groups like the III%ers militia or the Oath Keepers are defined as "antigovernment group[s]" by the Southern Poverty Law Center.¹⁴ This categorization of such armed groups is not exclusive to the SPLC, but is nearly ubiquitous in public discourse, and was frequently employed in news articles about the Oath Keepers, a paramilitary organization composed of military and police veterans, running ad hoc security for President Trump's inauguration.¹⁵ The "antigovernment" label establishes a category both distinct from "terrorist"—the category that names organized assertions of necropolitical power among racialized populations—yet supposedly articulated against the state itself. In the Trump era, the label has persisted even as it has become increasingly meaningless. In the last three years, rightwing paramilitary organizations have largely oriented their antagonism away from the federal government and toward the policing of racialized populations and the Left, throwing their capacity for violence behind efforts to patrol the US-Mexico border, seize space on college campuses for hate speech, police Black Lives Matter protests, and defend Trump rallies against counterprotesters.

The aporia dramatized so starkly by paramilitary groups rallying on behalf of the Trump administration being described as "antigovernment" is, like so many of the contradictions of civic life heightened by Trump's election, not an entirely new one. It was also evident in the reactions to the armed occupation of public lands at Bunkerville, Nevada, and the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge outside of Burns, Oregon by the Bundy family and their allies. These militants undertook their seizure of public land only recently appropriated from Indigenous peoples not in the name of an anti-statist or a revolutionary politics (as Alyosha Goldstein has noted in his work on the Bundy standoffs), but in the spirit of a popular constitutionalism that holds an AR-15 in one hand and an American flag in the other.¹⁶ Militias in the post-Cold War era proudly imagine themselves as the inheritors of the revolutionary violence of the militias at Lexington and Concord, but they are inheritors of a tradition of paramilitary organizing that just as surely has its roots in the slave patrols and colonial militias whose violence was aimed not at the imperial state, but at the racialized other. Settler colonial "pioneers," whether in the Deadwood camp in the Black Hills or the West Bank, are always tactical in their antagonism toward to state power, flouting the state when it attempts to limit their access to Indigenous resources or

racialized labor, but courting the state's power when they find it necessary to their aims of the conquest of territory and the elimination or policing of racialized populations.¹⁷ The Trump administration's promises to open further Indigenous homelands to extraction and more vigorously police the physical and racial borders of the settler polity are perfectly in line with this political tradition. By portraying the Patriot Movement as revolutionary (or at least potentially revolutionary), both liberal rhetoric representing right-wing paramilitary organizations as anti-government extremists and conservative rhetoric representing them as a bulwark against tyranny obfuscates the settler colonial and anti-black politics that the paramilitary right enacts.

The liberal vision of civic life in the United States depends on a willful forgetting of the foundational violence of settler sovereignty, demanding that right wing militias be understood as antigovernment, even when they appear waving American flags at a Blue Lives Matter rally. It is precisely this act of disavowal that prevents liberals from reading the Patriot movement as what it is: a tradition of popular constitutionalism that embraces rather than obscures the ongoing structures of violence that undergird civic life in the United States.

LaVoy Finicum's Allegory of Counter Sovereignty

LaVoy Finicum poses for a portrait at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge headquarters on Jan. 3, 2016.
Photo credit: Brooke Warren.

LaVoy Finicum's novel, *Only By Blood and Suffering*, conforms to the basic genre structures of survivalist fiction. It narrates the journey of a semi-autobiographical protagonist as he (and it's usually a he) flees an urban area after a catastrophic event (in the case of Finicum's novel, the event is the familiar right-wing canard of an electromagnetic pulse attack). He then sets up shop in a rural stronghold where he, his family, and a select group of allies fend off attacks from both the federal government (which has inevitably been compromised by some sort of internationalist conspiracy) and hordes of zombie-like bandits. Along the way, the protagonist is fastidious in his respect for the property rights of others, even as he mows down dozens of people defending his own. Like a surprising number of survivalist novels, Finicum's makes an attempt at something like a "post-racial" perspective. Finicum never overtly racializes the novel's villains, though are obliquely racialized by their descriptions as gang members and escaped prisoners.¹⁸ Unlike the novels of the overtly white supremacist right, such as William Luther Pierce's notorious *Turner Diaries*, Finicum's novel stands as an example of the sort of "color-blind" racism described by Eduardo Bonilla Silva.¹⁹ It concludes, again in conforming to genre type, with the promise of the restoration of a Lockean social contract achieved through the regenerative violence that dominates the novel's plot.²⁰ In the novel's climactic showdown, the villain, a white Homeland Security officer compromised by a vague internationalist conspiracy, declares that "this experiment of a free republic, of people being equal under the law, was a failure."²¹ Finicum's protagonist dedicates himself to restoring the liberal dream of US sovereignty through acts of law-making violence.

The genre of the survivalist novel leans heavily on tropes borrowed from the Western, and Finicum's novel is especially pronounced in this regard. In a paradigmatic liberal Western, the transition from the dynamic violence of the frontier to the peaceful order of the liberal state is evoked in a retrospective narrative that is simultaneously nostalgic and anxious.²² The disavowal of settler colonial violence is paired with an often barely sublimated desire for its return. In the survivalist novel, the law-making violence of the frontier is unapologetically projected into the future as fantasy.

For LaVoy Finicum, the fantasy of sovereign self-sufficiency was deeply aspirational. Jake Bonham, the rancher protagonist of *Only By Blood and Suffering*, is an archetype of the self-sufficient cowboy masculinity that LaVoy Finicum desired, but failed, to embody. In the last years of his life, Finicum lived with his third wife on a ranch outside of Prescott, Arizona. The ranch, by Finicum's own admission, generated no income; the Finicums survived on subsidies earned from parenting four foster children. These children were removed from the Finicum's custody by the state (leaving the Finicums without any substantial means of revenue) when Finicum began to draw national attention for his involvement in the standoff at Malheur.²³

The representations of firearms in *Only By Blood and Suffering* are central to both its aspirational fantasy and pedantic aims. Jake Bonham and his family own an arsenal of weapons that would cost a small fortune to amass, and nearly every gun introduced in the text is glossed in an explanatory footnote. These footnotes are aimed at underscoring Finicum's technological and historical authority and, by extension, the status of the gun as both a tool and a symbol.

Each gun in this arsenal has its task; but when it comes to insurrectionary violence, the AR-15 is the preferred weapon. The footnote on Jake Bonham's Colt AR-15 glosses the usual conservative talking points on the gun's utility and its misconstrual by control advocates:

The AR-15 is the military looking rifle that is currently being targeted by gun control efforts because of its looks and its ability to carry high capacity magazines. It looks like an automatic rifle but is only a semi-automatic. It shoots a .223 caliber bullet typically 55 grains in weight or the military 5.56 millimeter if the barrel is stamped with 5.56.²⁴

The narration then turns to a description of Bonham's preferred ammunition, with a footnote that lovingly describes the "expanding or frangible" qualities of the Hornady V-Max round, "devastating on small game such as coyotes," and far superior to full metal jacket rounds that do not cause "near the tissue damage."²⁵ The gruesome efficacy of these bullets in human tissue becomes an important plot point in the novel's climax.

It is this technological capacity to kill that underwrites what Finicum's narration calls "the immeasurable value that guns now represented" in his imagined dystopia. Against the tyrannical government and implicitly racialized hordes, the gun represents the necropolitical power of the sovereign subject. But the expression of this power requires its own legitimation. *Only by Blood and Suffering*, like so many US narratives, finds this legitimation in a frontier declension narrative. The Bonhams do not fight for a revolutionary future but a frontier past in which "a man used to be sovereign in his own home and his property was his own."²⁶ The Bonhams own a whole range of guns, including Winchester lever actions and a Colt 45, valued primarily not for their lethal efficiency, but for their symbolic connection to the frontier past. In all the novel's pivotal showdowns, Jake Bonham is figured carrying his AR-15, a semiautomatic pistol, and his "great grandfather's Colt revolver strapped to [his] hip. The old ways die hard. . ."²⁷ The Colt revolver is not fired until the plot's denouement, in which Jake, ambushed by three federal agents after successfully defending his ranch from an assault by government forces and conscripted prisoners, solidifies his sovereign claim on his home with his Western quick-draw skills.

Bonham's antiquated sidearm is one of many devices that Finicum deploys to allegorically connect the dystopian future to the nineteenth-century frontier, but it is in his representation of Indigenous peoples that Finicum most tellingly reveals the uncomfortable proximity of the Malheur occupiers' fantasy of popular sovereignty to more familiar fictions that legitimate the constituted power of the United States writ large. Jake Bonham begins the narrative alienated from his white wife, who ends up being killed by a marauding gang in Albuquerque, in part because she doubted her husband's belief that the family should be living in the survivalist compound he had set up at the family ranch. After rescuing his daughter and learning of his wife's death, Jake begins to make the arduous trek back to his ranch and is taken in for a night on the Navajo reservation by a Navajo woman named Sandy Yazzie.²⁸ The collapse of the first name referencing the land and the common Diné surname are significant: like the Indians in Turner's frontier thesis, Sandy represents authentic Indigeneity and also the wilderness itself.²⁹ From this encounter onward, the plot of *Only By Blood and Suffering* intertwines its narrative of popular sovereignty with a white-Indigenous love plot that functions to allegorize not decolonial reconciliation, but rather an attempt at legitimizing settler colonial claims.³⁰

Finicum carries this narrative of settler Indigenization to absurd extremes.³¹ As his relationship with Sandy unfolds, Bonham reveals that he descends from a family of frontier Indian fighters, who also intermarried with the Comanche, and that his great grandfather is buried on his ranch next to the Diné warriors he killed to establish his property claim. Bonham's relationship with Sandy is finally consummated (with a kiss) in an Indigenous cliff dwelling on his ranch. After the novel's climactic battle, Bonham buries one of his

daughters in an Indigenous grave site next to the body of an Indian girl. One could hardly imagine a more direct example of how the Indigenous body comes to serve as the transit whereby white life is rendered grievable.³²

Finicum's over-determined tale of settler indigenization recalls a trend that emerged in the Western genre in the 1920s, another period in US history marked by extreme white anxiety and violence directed toward racialized outsiders. In a study of Westerns created during this period, literary critic William Handley notes a peculiar obsession with representations of cliff dwellings, burial sites, and other ancient forms of Indigenous architecture. Identification with these spaces, Handley argues, represented an attempt by white Americans to "shore up their culture not only by keeping immigrants out but by assuming and absorbing, in an authenticating act of cultural theft, a culture of 'first Americans.'"³³ By identifying with architectures that embodied "a precedent for the destruction of a race and a civilization," settlers legitimated their own genocidal violence and gave voice to anxieties about their own supposed precarity.³⁴ This is precisely the register in which Finicum's embrace of Indigeneity operates.

As a long tradition of Indigenous critique reminds us, the appropriation of Indigenous cultures in the service of settler claims to legitimacy is hardly an exclusive practice of conservatism. By recognizing the uncomfortable proximity of Finicum's fantasy of settler indigenization to similar fantasies articulated by white liberal heroes—Gary Snyder's "white shamanism," or Elizabeth Warren's claims to Cherokee identity offer two obvious examples—we can grasp the root of liberal failures to contest his politics.³⁵ Finicum's sovereign claim, like the sovereign claim of the settler state itself, is articulated in relation to an Indigenous claim that must be repeatedly and anxiously evoked and appropriated.³⁶

Conclusion: Gun Culture and The Land Transfer Movement

In the four years since Finicum died, he has been canonized by an increasingly broad swath of the right, and the political causes he championed have achieved a string of stunning victories. In 2017, the Board of Supervisors of Mohave County Arizona, where Finicum owned his ranch, voted to rename a two mile stretch of highway in his honor. US courts have been largely unsuccessful in multiple attempts to hold his co-conspirators in the Bundy standoffs accountable for their armed seizure of federal lands. The Trump presidency and Republican-controlled Senate have held the line to prevent any meaningful action on gun control in the face of the latest string of horrific mass shootings and enabled the rollback of environmental protections on hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands in the West. In one of the most stark examples of the mainstreaming of Finicum's politics, Trump has installed William Perry Pendley, an outspoken attorney well-known for his aggressive stance against environmental protections and American Indian claims on public lands, as acting head of the Bureau of Land Management. Pendley's Twitter handle is @sagebrush_rebel.³⁷

Finicum's support for the struggle to deregulate federal lands and/or transfer their control to the states or private interests and his absolutist stance on the right to bear arms were intimately linked. The land transfer movement may seem tangential to considerations of the Second Amendment, but connections between the two extend beyond their confluence in the ideology of Finicum and the other militants in the Bundy family's orbit.

The driving force behind the large-scale preservation of public lands in the United States that began during Theodore Roosevelt's administration was not the value of ecological preservation per se, or a respect for the ongoing life of Indigenous nations. For Roosevelt and the cohort of white men who aided him in crafting the myth of the American frontier, public lands were necessary to the preservation of a national character defined by the martial and masculine values they believed in danger of disappearing in the wake of the closing of that frontier. While the conservation of public lands has provided an immeasurable good by preventing the despoliation of some of North America's most vital ecosystems, public lands were intended, and in many ways still function, as an arena for the re-creation of frontier experiences through outdoor recreation. The public lands of the United States are thus plagued by a fundamental contradiction: they are a commons created to memorialize a process of conquest and enclosure. As environmental humanities scholar April Anson has argued, this contradiction has dogged contemporary efforts to protect them as white liberal activists have seized on a rhetoric of ownership that celebrates the historical process of enclosure while attempting to forestall it in the present.³⁸

Like so much of the contemporary political and juridical discourse surrounding the Second Amendment, then, the discourse about public lands is too often reduced to a debate between competing affirmative visions of frontier conquest. The liberal iteration of this rhetoric celebrates the historic frontier as productive of a egalitarian democratic nation whose rough and ready origins can be affirmed through the practice of outdoor recreation. This alienates the Indigenous and racialized people whose land and labor constituted the frontier's largesse, but it just as surely alienates those among the white population who, having been denied the impossible promise of manifest destiny, take a cue from history and imagine the settler commons not as a space for recreation but an economic frontier that contains their piece of the pie. That men like Finicum are taking up arms to exert their right to extract value from these lands should come as no surprise in a nation that still imagines the frontier as productive of both popular sovereignty and economic autonomy.

On October 24, 2019, the mainstreaming of the survivalist novel and the ideology it represents attained a significant milestone with the nationwide theatrical release of *The Reliant*, a filmic adaptation of Dr. Patrick Johnston's successful novel of the same name.³⁹ Bankrolled by the online fundraising efforts of the author and executive producer Tim Schmidt, CEO of the US Concealed Carry Association, *The Reliant* is the story of a gun-loving family who, in the face of chaos spurred by the collapse of the dollar, take to the woods where their labor and command of violence allows them to live off the land and save themselves.⁴⁰ Like Finicum's novel, it is the story of both a "regeneration through violence" and an affirmation of the autonomy of the Turnerian yeoman achieved on (implicitly) public lands, which are imagined as a future frontier.


Contemporary gun culture in the United States is a phenomenon that requires those who would resist its violence to look to dynamics much older than the Trump administration and broader than the material culture of the gun itself. As Finicum's novel and the politics it enables demonstrate, gun culture is but one expression of a more foundational fantasy. By refusing the "move to innocence" that casts the fantasy of settler sovereignty articulated in survivalist novels like Finicum's as antithetical to normative affirmations of the United States as a frontier nation, we might take one important step toward joining in the work of "material restitution and symbolic rupture" necessary to think our relations otherwise.⁴¹







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Notes

1. John Wesley, Rawles, *Patriots: A Novel of Survival in the Coming Collapse*, 386–387. [↗](#)
2. "Guns on Campus: Overview," *National Council of State Legislatures*, August 14, 2018, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/guns-on-campus-overview.aspx> < <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/guns-on-campus-overview.aspx> >; David Smith, "Trump's Solution to School Shootings: Arm Teachers with Guns," *Guardian*, February 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/21/donald-trump-solution-to-school-shootings-arm-teachers-with-guns> < <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/21/donald-trump-solution-to-school-shootings-arm-teachers-with-guns> > . [↗](#)
3. For more on the concept of right-wing discourse as an "alternative public sphere," see Robert Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 196. [↗](#)
4. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11. [↗](#)
5. For an overview of the relationship between prerevolutionary racial and colonial violence and the Second Amendment, see Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2017), 29–40. [↗](#)
6. Charles W. Collier, "The Death of Gun Control: an American Fantasy," *Critical Inquiry* 41 (Autumn 2014): 117. [↗](#)
7. Collier, "Death of Gun Control," 120, emphasis mine. [↗](#)
8. Caroline Fraser, *Prairie Fires: The American Dream of Laura Ingalls Wilder* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017), 52–53. [↗](#)
9. Sanford Levinson, "The Embarrassing Second Amendment," *Yale Law Journal* 99, no. 3 (December 1989): 638–639. [↗](#)
10. Aziz Rana, "Colonialism and Constitutional Memory," *UC Irvine Law Review* 5 (2015): 266. [↗](#)
11. Rana, "Colonialism," 267. [↗](#)
12. Rana, "Colonialism," 263. [↗](#)
13. Jacquelyn Rose, *State of Fantasy* (London: Clarendon Press, 1996), 32. [↗](#)
14. "Active Antigovernment Groups in the United States," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/active-antigovernment-groups-united-states> < <https://www.splcenter.org/active-antigovernment-groups-united-states> > . [↗](#)
15. See, e.g., Elizabeth King, "Inside the J20 Prosecution: How the Feds are Criminalizing Dissent," *Pacific Standard*, December 12, 2017, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/j20-defendants-and-the-crackdown-on-protest> < <https://psmag.com/social-justice/j20-defendants-and-the-crackdown-on-protest> > . [↗](#)
16. "Putatively antigovernment white supremacy in the United States conjoins colonial and racial dispossession in its attacks on the US state. Rather than simply being anti-statist, such maneuvers are attempts to capture and redeploy state power in particular ways, while at the same time categorically denying the historical co-constitution of colonial and racial dispossession and how this remains crucial in the current conjuncture." Alyosha Goldstein, "By Force of Expectation: Colonization, Public Lands, and the Property Relation," *UCLA Law Review Discourse* 65, no. 124 (2018): 140. [↗](#)

17. Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 72. [↗](#)
18. LaVoy Finicum, *Only by Blood and Suffering: Regaining Lost Freedom* (Rochester: Legends Library, 2015), 4. [↗](#)
19. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009). [↗](#)
20. The violence in Finicum's novel plays the structural role of the "myth of regeneration through violence" that Richard Slotkin calls "the structuring metaphor of the American experience." Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Myth of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 5. [↗](#)
21. Finicum, *Only*, 142–143. [↗](#)
22. For more on the Western genre and liberalism, see Robert Pippin, *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth: The Importance of Howard Hawks and John Ford for Political Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). [↗](#)
23. John Sepulvado and Amelia Templeton, "Militant Says Foster Children Were Pulled from his Home," Oregon Public Broadcasting, last modified January 26, 2016, <https://www.opb.org/news/series/burns-oregon-standoff-bundy-militia-news-updates/militant-says-foster-children-were-pulled-from-his-home-lavoy-finicum-burns-oregon/> < <https://www.opb.org/news/series/burns-oregon-standoff-bundy-militia-news-updates/militant-says-foster-children-were-pulled-from-his-home-lavoy-finicum-burns-oregon/> > . [↗](#)
24. Finicum, *Only*, 61–62. [↗](#)
25. Finicum, *Only*, 62. [↗](#)
26. Finicum, *Only*, 124. [↗](#)
27. Finicum, *Only*, 119. [↗](#)
28. Finicum, *Only*, 94. [↗](#)
29. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. John Mack Faragher (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999), 33. [↗](#)
30. See Rayna Green's foundational essay on the sexualization of Native women in US culture, "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture," *Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 698–714. [↗](#)
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